Wilson Creek Allotment Management Plan & Environmental Assessment #OR135-03-EA-08 For Grazing Leases 360567 & 360675

Bureau of Land Management
Border Resource Area
Spokane District

September 2003

Proposed Decision, Rationale, and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)
For EA#OR135-03-EA-08 (Wilson Creek Allotment Management Plan)

Dear Interested Public
:
The following Proposed Decision and Finding of No Significant Impact for the Environmental Assessment of the proposed Wilson Creek Allotment Management Plan is enclosed for your review. If you wish to protest or appeal this proposed decision, you may do so in accordance with the procedures described below.

Proposed Decision and Rationale

Proposed Decision: Under the authority of the Code of Federal Regulations (43 CFR 4120.2[c] and [d], 43 CFR 4130.2[a] and [d], and 43 CFR 4160.1[a]), it is my proposed decision to adopt and implement Alternative 1 (Proposed Action). This decision is to issue a 10-year grazing lease for the Wilson Creek Allotment Management Plan, subject to management actions described in the attached EA as a term and condition of the grazing lease.

Rationale: The proposed allotment management plan is in conformance with the Record of Decision (ROD) for the Spokane Resource Management Plan (1987) and its amendment (1992). The RMP specifically provided for this grazing allotment and provides guidance for preparing Allotment Management Plans (AMPs) to establish livestock use levels, grazing systems, seasons of use, and range improvements. This AMP also addresses the requirement to take actions to achieve Standards for Rangeland Health (43 CFR 4180.2). The selected alternative (Proposed Action) provides for monitoring and pasture rotation, to address rangeland health.

Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

On the basis of environmental assessment #OR135-03-EA-08 and other available information, it is my determination that Alternative 1 (Proposed Action) does not constitute a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment (a finding of no significant impact). Therefore, this action does not require preparation of an environmental impact statement.

Protest

If you wish to protest this proposed decision in accordance with 43 CFR § 4160.2, you are allowed 15 days from receipt of this notice, to file a protest at the above address. The receipt of notice is determined by certified mail or publication of a legal notice as stated in the EA. A protest must be in writing and specify the reasons, clearly and concisely, as to why you believe the proposed decision is in error. If a protest is filed within the time allowed, the statement of reason and other pertinent information will be considered and a final decision will be issued with a right of appeal (43 CFR 4160.3[b]).

In the absence of a protest within the time allowed, the above proposed decision will constitute my final decision without further notice in accordance with 43 CFR § 4160.3[a]. If this becomes my final decision and you wish to appeal this decision for the purpose of a hearing before an Administrative Law Judge, in accordance with 43 CFR §§ 4160.4 and 4.470, you are allowed 45

days from receipt of this notice to file an appeal at the above address. The appeal must be in writing and shall state clearly and concisely why you think the decision is in error. Any request for a stay of this decision in accordance with 43 CFR § 4.21 must be filed with the appeal.

/s/ Rick McComas
Rick McComas, Acting Field Manager
Border Resource Area

September 30, 2003
Date

Wilson Creek Allotment Management Plan & Environmental Assessment #OR135-03-EA-08 For Grazing Leases 360567 & 360675

Introduction

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Spokane District is proposing an Allotment Management Plan (AMP) to issue two grazing leases (360567 and 360675) and additionally to address grazing of a 320-acre parcel in T26N, R31E, E1/2 section 36 which was recently acquired from Washington State. These parcels are located approximately 5 miles southwest of the community of Wilbur in Lincoln County, Washington (see map). This area is in the Upper Crab Creek Management Area of the Spokane District's Border Resource Area.

Purpose and Need

The purpose and need of the proposal and this assessment is to evaluate the offering of a 10-year grazing lease and to develop an AMP to provide site-specific management guidance in compliance with *Standards for Rangeland Health Standards and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management*. The Spokane Resource Management Plan Record of Decision (ROD) (1987) specifies developing Allotment Management Plans (AMPs) to establish livestock use levels, grazing systems, season of use, and range improvements.

Background

The BLM parcels in grazing leases 360567 (except NE1/4SW1/4 section 30) and 360675 (see map) were acquired by BLM in 1992 and 1993, respectively, and grazed by livestock since then. The parcel in the NE1/4SW1/4 of Section 30 (Pasture 4) is not an acquired parcel; it is part of grazing lease 360567. Grazing over the past 10 years on these two allotments has been light to moderate.

For the last 10 years, there were two lessees, but one lease was transferred in 2003 to the other lessee. With this transfer, both grazing leases (0567 and 0675) are with the same lessee.

Compliance with Other Planning Documents and Laws

Proposed grazing plans incorporate management goals consistent with multiple use objectives of livestock grazing, wildlife habitat, and watershed needs, as outlined by the Spokane Resource Management Plan ROD, 1987, and consistent with the Fundamentals for Rangeland Health and the Standards for rangeland Health. The Spokane Resource Management Plan (August, 1985, p.55) specifies that allotment management plans (AMPs) will be developed to establish livestock use levels, grazing systems, seasons of use and the need for range improvements. This AMP conforms to that direction.

Description of Alternatives

Two alternatives (Proposed Action and No Grazing) were analyzed, as described below.

Alternative 1 - Proposed Action

The Proposed Action is to issue two 10-year grazing leases on two allotments encompassing approximately 1,892 acres of BLM-administered land (see attached map). The 320-acre recently acquired parcel in Section 36 would be included in Allotment #360567. Both leases would be issued to the grazing lessee who currently has grazing lease #360567. Pastures 1, 2, and 3 would be managed as "Improve" (I) pastures because they are fenced separately from private lands, which provides for flexible grazing management. Pasture 4 would be managed as a "Custodial" (C) pasture because it is fenced in with private lands.

The grazing plan requested by the grazing lessee is as follows for the years 2003 to 2007, with the alternating use pattern continuing thereafter. Exact beginning and end dates may vary, depending on weather and other site conditions. The grazing lessee's herd of cattle is about 51 animals.

Pasture Rotation						
Pasture	**Size (Acres)**	**Proposed Pasture Use By Year**				
		2003	**2004**	**2005**	**2006**	**2007**
1	217	No use	No use	9/1-9/30	No use	9/1-9/30
2	675	No use	5/22-6/20	No use	5/22-6/20	No use
3	960	9/1-9/30	4/23-5/21	9/1-9/30	4/23-5/21	9/1-9/30
4	40	Grazed with adjacent private lands as a "C" allotment.				

In the years that Pasture 1 would be used with Pasture 3 in September, there would be no increase in Animal Unit Months (AUMs). (Note: One AUM equates to grazing use by one cow and calf for one month.)

A total of 70 AUMs would be authorized for both leases (40 AUMs for lease #3600675 and 30 AUMs for lease #3600567). The permitted number of AUMs could be increased if use is consistent with BLM's multiple use management objectives.

Utilization will be evaluated throughout the grazing season to ensure proper use in accordance with the Spokane Resource Management Plan/EIS (Aug. 1985). Seasons of use and livestock numbers may vary from those described above, depending on environmental and management factors as determined by the authorized officer in consultation with BLM staff and the grazing lessee.

Alterative 2: No Grazing

This alterative is to not offer these lands for grazing. The BLM would have to construct about 0.75 mile of new fence to keep cattle off pasture 4, which is now fenced in with private lands. The BLM would have to maintain about 8.5 miles of fence to have control of these lands.

Management Actions/Project Design Features Common to Alternatives

General Use Guidance

- The rotation grazing plans will not allow more than 50 percent use during the growing season, or more than 60 percent use during the dormant season. If grazing or mechanical damage of Washington polemonium occurs, cattle would be removed from the pasture. Cattle would be removed from the pastures with riparian areas (Pastures 1 and 3) when stubble height requirements of 6 inches on key plant species are achieved, or before browsing or mechanical damage to shrubs by livestock could limit site capability and potential criteria.

- If monitoring determines that the grazing guidelines discussed above are not being met, livestock would be moved to the next scheduled pasture in the rotation and grazed for the planned length of time, or until the target utilization level is reached. If no pastures remain in the rotation, livestock would be removed from the allotment.

Range Improvements

- Additional range improvements (such as fences or water developments) would be constructed based on monitoring, to achieve or maintain rangeland health standards, as required by 43 Code of Federal Regulations, Subpart 4180 (Rangeland Health). Range improvements include any project or construction activity occurring within the rangeland ecosystem that is designed to achieve or maintain Rangeland Health Standards as described in Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Grazing Management (USDI 1997).

- The grazing lessee will maintain all range improvements. The BLM may contribute building materials for maintenance and major repair work.

Resource Inventories

- Appropriate resource inventories (including cultural, botanical and wildlife) will be conducted prior to implementing specific projects on the allotment. If cultural resources are found in the project area during project implementation, the project will be redesigned to avoid impacting the site. If the site cannot be avoided, consultation will be conducted with the Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation and the Colville Confederated Tribes. If cultural remains are encountered during project implementation, the disturbing activity will be halted, a BLM Archaeologist will be contacted, and the resource protected until a BLM archaeologist has assessed the historic significance of the resource.

Noxious Weeds and Invasive Plants

- Noxious/invasive weeds will be treated or controlled using chemical or biological methods, as needed and according to the *Final EIS for Vegetation Treatment on BLM Lands in Thirteen Western States* dated July 1991, the Spokane District Noxious Weed Control Environmental Assessment, and any subsequent updates, revisions, or replacements to either of these documents.

Monitoring and Evaluation

- Monitoring and evaluation will be done in accordance with the Spokane District Monitoring Plan.

- Monitoring of riparian plant communities and stream form and function will consider site capability and potential and be consistent with Rangeland Health Standards.

- Herbaceous stubble height in riparian areas and wetlands will be measured using the Photographic Guide to Median Stubble Heights technique (USDI 1999).

- Utilization levels of key upland native plant species will be no more than 50% utilization of the current year's growth by weight.

- Additional photo monitoring will be established in the allotment to monitor hardwood/shrub trend. This will be used to determine site potential and site capability criteria of shrubs and hardwood species.

- Riparian vegetation and Washington polemonium sites will be monitored to assess the effects of grazing and to determine any needed changes in management.

- Activities undertaken as part of this grazing lease will comply with the Conservation Agreement between BLM and the Fish and Wildlife Service (1985) regarding Washington polemonium, consistent with BLM policy, to ensure that management actions will not lead to the need for listing of the species. These protective measures will include monitoring of invasive species in the vicinity of Washington polemonium and appropriate control measures, as deemed necessary.

- Other evaluations of the allotment use and resource values, in addition to the Rangeland Health Assessment, will be conducted, as needed, after reviewing the monitoring reports.

Other Measures

- In the event of a wildfire, important resource values (including Washington polemonium sites) on BLM-administered lands in the Wilson Creek area will be protected. Such protection may include providing a fireline around the resource. The protection will be coordinated with assigned resource advisors on fires 10 acres in size or greater.

Affected Environment & Environmental Impacts

Soils

The predominant soil within this area is Roloff-Bakeoven-Rock outcrop complex, zero to 15 percent slopes. This soil is very shallow to moderately deep and well drained. This complex is mainly used for rangeland.

Probable Impacts on Soils: Considering the proposed grazing system in Alternative 1 (Proposed Action), impacts to the soils resources are expected to be minimal. Under Alternative 2 (No Grazing), soil erosion could occur from natural climatic conditions.

Water Resources/Riparian Areas

Water Resources: The water quality on Wilson Creek is generally good. Water testing of physical, chemical, and bacteriological parameters indicates that water quality meets or exceeds the standards for a Class "B" surface water (good water quality) within the state of Washington, as identified by the Washington Department of Ecology.

Riparian Areas: Historically, Wilson Creek has run intermittently through Section 29 and 31. In a personal interview with Mr. Bagley, who has lived in the area for the past 82 years, he stated that Wilson Creek in Sections 29 and 31 (see map) has not supported woody vegetation during his life. Wilson Creek in Section 20 used to have trees and shrubs growing on it. This was Mr. Bagley's family's property, and Mr. Bagley said his father and uncle cut firewood on Wilson Creek in Section 20. Mr. Bagley said the trees and shrubs on Wilson Creek in Section 20 were damaged by weed control efforts to stem spread of the Whitetop weed.

Pastures 1 and 2 contain approximately 16 acres of lentic habitat (mostly ephemeral) and 1.2 miles of lotic habitat (Wilson Creek; intermittent). Proper functioning condition (PFC) determinations were originally performed in 1995. All lentic systems were determined to be in proper functioning condition and thus were meeting the standard for watershed function. The reach of Wilson Creek that flows through Pastures 1 and 2 was rated as non-functioning. It was determined that channel condition, streambed composition and stability, and bank stability and vegetative root development were poor. Therefore, in 1995, the lotic system was not meeting the standard for watershed function.

In 2002, all (100%) of the lentic habitat in Pastures 1 and 2 was rated as properly functioning. However, several of the wetlands lacked a diverse composition of wetland vegetation necessary for habitat maintenance, even though they are capable of supporting this composition/structure. All (100%) of the lotic habitat in Pastures 1 and 2 was rated to be in proper functioning condition. This suggests that the lotic habitat may be improving. Vegetative indicators (such as plant vigor, age-class distribution, and root development) were rated as being in good condition, and yet some hydrological and vegetative conditions were still not satisfactory. For example, sinuosity, width/depth ratio, and gradient were not in balance with the landscape setting, indicating the potential for accelerated erosion. Lotic areas should continue to be monitored to ensure that such hydrological qualities and plant species diversity is consistent with site potential.

Pasture 3 contains approximately 20.43 acres of lentic habitat (intermittent) and 1.5 miles of lotic habitat (Wilson Creek; intermittent). Proper functioning condition (PFC) determinations were originally performed in 1995. All lentic systems were determined to be in proper functioning condition and thus were meeting the standard for watershed function. The reach of Wilson Creek that flows through Pasture 3 was rated as non-functioning. It was determined that channel condition, streambed composition and stability, and bank stability and vegetative root development were poor. Therefore, in 1995, the lotic system was not meeting the standard for watershed function.

In 2002, all (100%) of the lentic habitat in Pasture 3 was rated to be in proper functioning condition. However, some (29%) of the wetlands did not have a diverse age-class distribution of riparian/wetland vegetation, and many (75%) of the wetlands did not have a diverse composition

of wetland vegetation. The reduced diversity may be attributed at least in part to the alkaline nature of these intermittent wetlands. All (100%) of the lotic habitat in Pasture 3 was rated to be in proper functioning condition. This suggests that the lotic habitat may be improving. Lotic areas should continue to be monitored to ensure that hydrological qualities and plant species diversity is consistent with site potential.

Overall, current lentic and lotic conditions indicate that these habitats are meeting the standard for watershed function.

Note: The Wilson Creek Allotment was formerly divided into two separate allotments, with Pastures 1 and 2 in one allotment, and Pasture 3 in the second allotment.

Probable Impacts on Water Resources/Riparioan Areas: Under Alternative 1 (Proposed Action), impacts are expected to be minimal due to the proposed grazing regime which provides for grazing mostly outside the critical time period for plant growth, which is generally the summer months. The proposed level of grazing and monitoring would also provide protective measures for water resources and riparian areas. Under Alternative 2 (No Grazing), no impacts were identified.

Vegetation

The Wilson Creek Allotment is within Daubenmire's threetip sagebrush/Idaho fescue zone. This community occurs on some northwest-facing slopes in sections 29, 31 and 32 east of Wilson Creek. The predominant upland vegetation within the allotment is big sagebrush/bluebunch wheatgrass, with Thurber's needlegrass also common in this community. Stiff sagebrush/ Sandberg's bluegrass occurs on shallow soils. Basin wild rye and quackgrass are common in the broad riparian zone along Wilson Creek. Whitetop, a noxious perennial weed, has become well established in the riparian area and has spread to upland sites as well.

The NW 1/4 of Section 32 and SW 1/4 of Section 29 east of the county road are in good condition, dominated by native bunchgrasses and supporting a diverse assortment of forbs and sub-shrubs. There are relatively few non-native annual grasses present in this part of the allotment. The southeast one-quarter of Section 29 was formerly cultivated and has been reseeded. The sloping portion supports a mixture of cultivated grasses (Sherman big bluegrass, crested wheatgrass, and bluebunch wheatgrass) along with some native grasses, and the flatter area above has big sagebrush and gray rabbitbrush with Thurber's needlegrass, cheatgrass and Japanese brome. The northern part of Section 29 has experienced more disturbance in the past, in part associated with operation of the gravel pit.

The portion of the allotment in Sections 30 and 31 west of the creek includes numerous basalt outcrops and low swales. The predominant plant community is big sagebrush/bluebunch wheatgrass, with a substantial component of Thurber's needlegrass present. Japanese brome, an annual grass, is also common in this community. Shallow soil areas, dominated by stiff sagebrush/Sandberg's bluegrass, occur in a mosaic with the big sagebrush community. Many small shallow ponds, most of which were dry in July 2001, are scattered across this area. Saltgrass occurs around wetland edges where the gradient is gentle, and in other flat low areas. Whitetop is common at the periphery of wetlands, and in swales.

Probable Impacts on Vegetation: Under Alternative 1 (Proposed Action), upland and riparian native plant communities in Pastures 1, 3 and 4 would likely maintain existing levels of cover. There could be a reduction of plant cover in Pasture 2 in response to an increased level of use over past years. Pasture rotation, utilization monitoring, and continuation of control measures for Whitetop would contribute to maintaining or improving rangeland health standards in all pastures.

Under Alternative 2 (No Grazing), upland and riparian native plant communities would likely maintain or increase their cover. The absence of grazing could allow greater establishment of native plants in the riparian area; however, because of the invasive characteristics of Whitetop, control measures for this noxious weed would need to be continued indefinitely to allow native species to establish.

Special Status Species

No federally listed or proposed plant species occur within the project area. The proposed grazing lease areas were surveyed for Spalding's catchfly, a listed species that occurs further east in Lincoln County, and the plant was not found. Washington polemonium (*Polemonium pectinatum*), a Bureau Sensitive species and Washington Threatened species, occurs adjacent to Wilson Creek in the northeast quarter of Section 29. There are approximately 150 plants on the west side of the road in Pasture 1, and 100 to 150 plants in Pasture 2 between the road and Wilson Creek, near the northern boundary of BLM. There is also a record of a single plant in Section 31 (Pasture 3).

Probable Impacts on Special Status Species: Washington polemonium is a perennial plant that produces annual shoots from a subterranean crown; shoots emerge in March and April, flowering occurs during May and June, and the shoots begin to senesce shortly thereafter. The plants do not appear to be highly attractive as forage. However, removal of shoot tips by grazing or browsing animals is occasionally observed; one instance occurred in a pasture with no domestic livestock, so was apparently attributable to deer, and another instance occurred in a pasture grazed by horses. The plants may also experience physical damage from trampling if livestock congregate in areas (such as riparian terraces and moist swales) where it grows. Because of moisture availability, these habitats are also prone to invasion by noxious weeds such as whitetop, Canada thistle and Russian knapweed, which compete with this species.

Under Alternative 1, livestock would be present in the riparian area of Pasture 1 every other year during a time when Washington polemonium plants are dormant. Because of this timing, livestock would not have direct effects on Washington polemonium. Livestock would be present in Pastures 2 and 3 every other year during the vegetative growth/flowering/fruiting period for Washington polemonium. Although observations from these allotments and others suggest that livestock do not appear to have much interest in consuming Washington polemonium, cattle could damage the plants by trampling while consuming other riparian vegetation, and some incidental consumption could occur. Frequent monitoring of the riparian area during the time that livestock are present would reduce the likelihood of such damage occurring. Resting the pasture during the growing season of Washington polemonium every other year would give Washington polemonium plants, and associated riparian vegetation, the opportunity to recover from losses that might be sustained during a previous season of use.

Further, the Washington polemonium plants in Pasture 2 are limited by habitat availability to the northwest corner of the pasture. If monitoring indicates that livestock are having a negative impact on the plants, that portion of the pasture could be fenced to exclude livestock from the Washington polemonium population. Livestock do consume Whitetop and could reduce the amount of competition provided by that species, possibly decreasing, although not eliminating, the need for chemical control of Whitetop in those years that livestock are present early in the season.

Under Alternative 2, no livestock would be present on the allotments, so no direct or indirect effects of livestock grazing would occur. Washington polemonium might experience some browsing by wild ungulates such as deer. Litter accumulation is likely to be greater in the absence of livestock, which could decrease the likelihood of seedling establishment for Washington polemonium, but the potential for invasion of competing non-native weedy species would also be reduced. Because Whitetop is already well established in the areas where Washington polemonium grows, control measures for this noxious rhizomatous weed would still need to continue yearly.

Wildlife Habitat

Various amphibians, reptiles, migratory land birds, and mammals are known to utilize the wetland/riparian and upland habitats in these two allotments. The presence of these species is an index of the diversity of animal populations and plant communities on which they depend. In particular, the abundance and diversity of waterfowl and shorebird species are relatively high.

Portions of the riparian area appear to be used extensively by waterfowl for foraging and probably breeding due to dense vegetative cover, large pools, braided stream sections, and side channels. The Wilson's phalarope was identified on this allotment during 2002 surveys and is a Priority Species (breeding occurrence) for Washington State. The lotic, lentic and upland habitats appear to be meeting this standard for ecological processes as it relates to animal species due to habitat diversity, forage and cover needed to sustain species use throughout all or part of their seasonal requirements.

Adhering to a grazing management plan that reduces grazing impacts in the riparian areas should allow for recovery of the woody vegetation/structure on portions of Wilson Creek capable of supporting this habitat for a diversity of wildlife species.

Special Status Wildlife Species: In 2002, BLM biologists conducted general wildlife surveys and surveys for sharp-tail grouse (federal species of concern/state threatened) and Washington ground squirrels (federal and state candidate species). No Federally proposed, listed threatened or endangered wildlife species are known to currently occur within the parcels, although Columbia sharp-tailed grouse (State Threatened and Federal Species of Concern) have been observed within 2 miles. The allotment area is in historic range of sage grouse (federally proposed) and sharp-tailed grouse. Two verified loggerhead shrike (federal species of concern/state candidate species) sightings occurred in 1994 in the vicinity of the allotments. A verified white-tailed jackrabbit (state candidate species) sighting occurred in 1997 within 1 mile of the allotments. These two allotments are meeting Rangeland Standard 5 by providing diverse habitat and community elements needed for native, threatened/endangered, and locally important species use.

Probable Impacts on Wildlife: Under Alternative 1 (Proposed Action), riparian habitat quality would likely be maintained at existing levels. Dormant season grazing of Pasture 1 would not likely affect nesting waterfowl directly, although decreased cover could result in reduced nesting habitat quality. Upland wildlife habitat quality in Pasture 1 would likely be maintained. Upland wildlife habitat quality in Pasture 2 would likely decline slightly from current conditions due to increased livestock use over past years, although rangeland health should be maintained. Wildlife habitat quality, both upland and riparian, in Pasture 3 would likely be maintained at current levels.

Under Alternative 2 (No Grazing), waterfowl and shorebird foraging and nesting habitat would likely improve as riparian vegetation and stream channel morphology are reestablished. Upland wildlife habitat would likely improve as plant cover increases and therefore increasing the quality and quantity of habitat for shrub-steppe obligate species.

Cultural/Paleontological Resources

The portion of the Channeled Scablands in which this allotment is located is part of the territory traditionally used by the Moses or Columbia Salish bands as a source of many important plant materials. Today, the Moses/Columbia Salish tribe is one of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation. Prominent among Scabland plant resources are the edible roots that can be harvested in large quantities from the rocky soil. Although roots are no longer a staple food, many Native Americans still come to traditional locations in the Scablands to dig them. The Wilson Creek floodplain would also have provided Native American residents with access to such riparian resources as waterfowl and the rushes used to roof winter houses and is a likely location for evidence of Native American settlement.

Early Euro-American settlements were concentrated on the area's floodplains and well-watered bottomlands, with the uplands used largely for grazing. Since open range grazing leaves little physical evidence, most remains of early 19th Century are expected to occur on floodplains. Fifty acres in Section 31 and 80 acres in Section 29 had BLM cultural resource surveys in 1990 and 1993. Two cultural sites, both talus pits, exist in this allotment.

There are no known paleontological resources in this allotment, and probability for the occurrence of such resources is low. The only recorded paleontological resources in the Channeled scablands are in Miocene lakebeds preserved between basalt flows, in the Pleistocene gravels deposited at the end of the last glaciation, and in the very early (Cambrian) sedimentary rocks below the basalts. Exposures of all these fossil-bearing resources are very limited in extent and not known to exist in this allotment. Neither alternative would affect any known paleontological resources.

Probable Impacts on Cultural/Paleontological Resources: In Alternative 1 (10-year lease with pasture rotation), grazing during the growing season of native root plants (late March through May) may damage the above-ground parts of the plants, decreasing the visibility and availability of these plants for harvest. Allowing the pastures to "rest" in alternate years would partially mitigate this impact. The native root crops in the ungrazed pastures would be allowed to mature every other year, producing both above-ground foliage that can be identified for harvest and seeds that would assure a continuing population of the plants.

Pasture rotation would minimize soil compaction and erosion that might otherwise damage sub-surface cultural materials. Rock features, the only known cultural sites in this allotment, would not be affected because they are located in areas that are not heavily grazed.

In Alternative 2 (No Grazing), discontinuation of grazing could allow native plants to mature every year, rather than every other year. This would allow them to reproduce annually, likely resulting in larger populations. The effect of competition with non-native weed species after grazing pressure is removed is unknown.

Recreation

These two allotments are within the dispersed recreation area (wild land recreation area) and are valued for scenic qualities as part of the Channeled Scablands. The area offers over two miles of Wilson Creek frontage. Recreation use primarily consists of upland bird and deer hunting, and fishing. Other recreational uses may include hiking, wildlife viewing, and dispersed camping. In the past, these activities have taken place without conflict with grazing.

Probable Impacts on Recreation: Under Alternative 1 (Proposed Action), the proposed grazing use is not expected to have any permanent impacts on the recreational uses in this area, although the presence of livestock may discourage some recreational activities. Future conflicts with grazing activity are unlikely, but may increase due to projected increases in recreational use on public land.

Under Alternative 2 (No Grazing), recreational uses of the area would not likely be impacted.

Socioeconomic

The grazing leases are providing 70 AUMs of forage for a sole rancher. The 70 AUMs of forage equates to a value of approximately $95 income to the BLM per year. Half of this amount is distributed to Lincoln County, and the other half is designated for range improvements.

Probable Impacts on Socioeconomics: Alternative 1 (Proposed Action) would continue to provide the 70 AUMs of forage. Alternative 2 (No Grazing) would not support grazing use in the Wilson Creek area, and result in non-availability of 70 AUMs of forage.

Other Resource Elements Considered in the Analysis Process

Environmental Justice: No disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on minority or low-income populations are expected to result from implementation of any of the alternatives addressed in this EA.

Critical Elements That Were Considered:

- Air quality
- Wild and scenic rivers
- Prime/unique farmlands
- Floodplain
- Wastes (Hazardous or Solid)
- Special area designations (including Areas of Critical Environmental Concern)
- Wilderness
- Invasive non-native species
- Energy resources

There were no issues associated with the above list of critical elements, because they would either not be affected or were not present on the subject allotment area.

Cumulative Impacts

This allotment is within the Upper Crab watershed/subbasin (1,172,104 acres), approximately 4 percent of which is managed by BLM (51,276 acres). Approximately 40,756 acres of this watershed are managed as grazing allotments by BLM. The acreage in the Wilson Creek Allotment represents approximately 4.6 percent of the total BLM lands in the sub-basin. Most private land within the watershed/sub-basin is used for farming and ranching.

Coordination/Consultation With Other Agencies, Groups and Individuals

This allotment management plan and environmental assessment was prepared by an interdisciplinary team of BLM resource specialists representing various resource values, including soils, hydrology (water), wildlife habitat, cultural values, and botany.

Consultation on the renewal of lease 0675 and other leases was initiated by letters dated December 17, 2002 to The Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Reservation, the Spokane Tribe, the Yakama Indian Nation, and the Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (OAHP). Consultation on the renewal of lease 0567 and other grazing leases was initiated by a letter dated January 2, 2003 to the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Reservation, the Spokane Tribe, the Yakama Indian Nation, and the OAHP. Responses to both letters from OAHP and the Spokane Tribe indicate that neither group had concerns with the lease renewals. No other responses were received.

Consultation on this allotment management plan was initiated with the The Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation and the OAHP by letters dated September 9, 2003. All interested parties were requested to provide input to the proposed action and to identify any concerns with the project within 30 days.

The EA will be made available for public review and comment through a legal publication in The Spokesman Review, a regional newspaper. News releases about the EA availability will be sent to the Odessa Record and the Davenport Times, which are rural newspapers in the general area of the grazing leases. In addition, the EA will be posted on the Spokane BLM Internet website <www.or.blm.gov/spokane>. Copies of the EA will also be mailed by request.